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# Road Runner: State wants to know if Tucson-Phoenix rail line is needed

By Andrea Kelly

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The state wants to study whether we really need light rail service or a passenger train connecting Tucson and Phoenix.

It has \$1 million from the federal government to use on the study, and it hopes to find out more about how a train might affect everything from people to plants to prairie dogs along the route.

Any transportation project using federal funds — which the state hopes to get more of to help pay for a train — has to go through environmental studies. And the state has to figure out how to match the federal government's contribution with another \$1 million.

The main problem is that there's no money to build a train or light-rail system, even if the study shows the project is extremely important to Arizona's residents and transportation system.

On top of that, who knows how the budget-challenged state will come up with the matching \$1 million?

Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez has said in the past that the state will run out of money to do anything other than maintenance by 2015. That means no new roads, no widening of roads that are outmoded, and no additional projects, no matter what. It means just keeping the roads safe.

The department gets some of its funding from the state gasoline tax and fees from licensing and vehicle registration, plus some projects rely on federal funding, too.

Mendez used the same maintenance line earlier this year when an initiative to raise the state sales tax to fund transportation was on its way to the ballot.

This summer, the initiative was disqualified from the ballot because supporters failed to gather the required number of signatures. So unless another funding source is found, the train idea seems to have been derailed before it hits the tracks.

It's an example of what we'll be hearing more about as governments continue to struggle with budget cuts and lower revenue. Transportation funding problems stretch from the federal coffers to city budget book.

## RoadQ

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Q: "What limitations do the bus (and bike) lanes such as the ones on East Tanque Verde (Road) have? Of course, I see city buses driving in them all the time, and see other vehicles use them as right-turn lanes. However, a number of times this week I have noticed a TUSD (Tucson Unified School District) school bus pull into the bus lane at least half a mile before Pima (Street, heading west), where it turned right. Is a bus lane for any bus, including handicap Van Tran types? If not, is it OK to pull into the bus lane to pass traffic as long as I eventually turn right? Or was this bus driver just exhibiting illegal behavior?" David Newsom wrote.

A: The "bus lane" signs refer to city Sun Tran and Van Tran buses, said Michael Graham, spokesman for the Tucson Department of Transportation.

Drivers getting into the lane to turn right must do so at the next intersection, said Sgt. Tim Beam of the Tucson Police Department. "Intersection" refers to streets, not driveways, he said.

Beam's example: "You are westbound on Broadway, and you get into the bus lane east of Mountain View Avenue, and rather than turn right on Mountain View, you continue to Swan. That is a violation of the bus-lane statutes, and you can be cited for that."

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• Road Runner answers road-related questions in this column on Mondays. Find Road Runner plus traffic cams and other transportation news at [azstarnet.com/transportation](http://azstarnet.com/transportation). Send your questions by e-mail to [roadrunner@azstarnet.com](mailto:roadrunner@azstarnet.com) or to P.O. Box 26807, Tucson, AZ 85726. Please include your first and last names. • Find traffic updates and other transportation news on the Gridlocked blog, at [go.azstarnet.com/gridlocked](http://go.azstarnet.com/gridlocked).

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